

The S-2's Three Steps To Successful Scout Operations

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Whether at one of the training centers or in combat, the most challenging task for a maneuver battalion S-2 is producing a workable reconnaissance and surveillance (R&S) plan. To meet his collection requirements, the S-2 most frequently turns to the battalion's organic scout platoon, and the scouts tend to be overburdened or misused.

Through careful planning and employment, a scout platoon can make the S-2 a hero, and there are three steps he can take to improve scout R&S operations:

- Set the stage for success by tasking the scouts with the right type of mission, one that takes full advantage of their unique abilities, without abusing them.
- Once a specific mission is determined, develop a complete, viable plan.
- Take care of the scouts; if the S-2 doesn't, nobody else will.

The scout platoon can perform a wide variety of missions. They are indeed the eyes and ears of the battalion and, in addition to standard R&S missions, they can support the battalion through economy of force.

The following are some possible missions for the scouts:

- Determine and report the strength, equipment, disposition, organization, and movement of enemy forces.
- Locate reserves, command posts, and key facilities.
- Perform reconnaissance and surveillance of specific sites, routes, or areas, and determine enemy movement patterns.
- Maintain surveillance over suspected infiltration routes and avenues of approach.

- Perform pathfinder procedures for airborne and air assault operations.
- Conduct battle damage assessments.
- Conduct deception operations.
- Locate and observe targets for direct and indirect fires.

CHECKLIST FOR SCOUT MISSION PLANNING

- **Determine the need for scout operations with the commander and S-3.**
 - Can someone else do it better?
 - Is it feasible, suitable, acceptable?
- **Give scout platoon leader a warning order.**
- **Request data base and intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) products from brigade S-2, and issue maps.**
- **Determine transportation method, with S-4 and S-3 air.**
 - Select landing zones, primary and alternate.
 - Request aircraft.
 - Request other transportation.
- **Select reconnaissance specifics and mission parameters.**
 - What do we want to collect?
 - What are the priority intelligence requirements (PIRs)?
 - Convert PIRs into collectable specific information requirements (SIRs).
 - When do we need it? What is the last time information is of value?
- **Communications requirements:**
 - Primary and alternate communications means.
 - Need for retransmission site or relay?
 - Call signs, frequencies, cipher.
 - Operational schedules.
 - Reports and reporting.
- **Contingencies:**
 - Escape and evasion plan, routes, rally points.
 - Communications breakdown.
 - Wargame possible contingencies.
- **Conduct overflight, if possible.**
 - Primary and alternate LZs.
 - Overfly and photograph reconnaissance box and march route.
 - Debrief overflight.
- **Other mission requirements:**
 - Deception, false insertion.
 - Requirement for specialists: demolition, tactical air control party (TACP), ground surveillance systems (GSS), engineer, host nation.
 - Fire support planning: mortars, artillery, naval gunfire, close air support (with FSO).
 - Coordination with adjacent units.
 - Passage of lines.
 - Link-up plan.
 - Extraction.
 - Refit plan.
- **Issue five-paragraph operations order and R&S matrix, including:**
 - What to look for (SIRs, signatures, and indicators).
 - Where to look.
 - When and how long to look.
 - Coordination.
 - How to report.
- **Monitor mission.**
- **Conduct debriefing.**

- Provide security for main body through screening operations.

Although the scout platoon is versatile, it is a small unit that can easily be overtaken. A full-strength scout platoon with three squads and a platoon headquarters can normally accomplish two or three separate tasks. Given more, the scouts tend to lose focus on the specifics of each mission. Tasking them with the wrong missions or with too many missions will only lead to disaster. Mission selection is the basis for successful operations.

Successful use of the scouts is a direct result of good planning. Because the scouts normally deploy well before the main body, the planning process is often compressed. As a result, the planning time available must be used carefully. A complete, well-thought-out plan allows the scouts to execute the mission with minimal problems.

Once the plan is complete, it needs to be developed into a full, five-paragraph operations order (OPORD). The scout platoon leader, his plan, and the platoon

OPORD will be only as good as the one provided by the battalion staff.

The accompanying checklist provides a standard format for scout mission planning and ensures that no important details are omitted.

The S-2 needs to be the proponent for all scout operations. Coordination with all other staff sections is important, but it must be the S-2 who ensures that nothing is neglected. If the helicopters don't show up, for example, it may well be the fault of the S-3 air, but it's the S-2's R&S mission.

The S-2 must watch out for the welfare of the scout platoon. Everyone wants something from the scouts—the battalion commander, the HHC commander, the S-3—but nobody is charged with providing for their needs. The scout platoon leader and platoon sergeant must pay close attention to the training, missions, and logistical support of the unit. Working out of the tactical operations center, the scout platoon sergeant can act as the liaison between the scouts and the staff. If he is not available, the

S-2 sections must provide the link. If their administrative and logistical needs are coordinated, the scouts will be free to concentrate on the S-2's collection mission.

Scout operations are the bread and butter of successful R&S plans. The S-2 and the scouts must therefore have a good relationship, one that is based on mutual trust. First, the S-2 lays the groundwork for success by assigning the scouts a mission that fulfills his needs and that they can reasonably accomplish. Second, he develops a workable plan. Third, he takes care of his best intelligence collectors.

These three steps will improve any R&S plan and ultimately improve a battalion's probability of success.

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Cordon and Search

Lessons Learned in Somalia

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Early in 1993 the 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry, in Somalia was assigned responsibility for a humanitarian relief sector at Marka. For the next four months, the battalion was involved in security and counterbandit operations along the entire length of the lower Shabelle Valley (Figure 1). These operations included convoy security, show of force, continuous patrolling of the area of operations, and cordon and search.

Cordon and search operations were normally conducted when the battalion received intelligence of bandit operations in a certain area. This intelligence was usually obtained from interrogations or volunteered by local people. (Often these people would inform on each other in an effort to have us go in and disarm their opponents.) Although much of this intelligence had to be accepted with some skepticism, we even-

tuallly developed a good idea of where selected bandit groups were in the valley.

One of the areas of frequent bandit activity was the airfield south of Afgoi near the small village of Lantabur. This airfield was the main site in the country for the delivery of *khat*, the mildly narcotic stimulant grown in Kenya and chewed by most of the people in Somalia. Its traffic was very profitable, and many of the bandits in the valley either